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Philip Mann

*A New Maestro
for an ASO*

Exciting New Season

Aquariums for Kids:

More than Just Garage Sale Items



are doomed to failure if your aquarium is not big enough to keep a pair of Orca whales. Rather, it means that you should get the largest aquarium possible that fits both in your home and within your budget.

For those parents who already have an aquarium and are planning to set it up again for your kids, keep in mind that some fish need more space or more filtration than others, so be willing to compromise when it comes to fish choice. If you owned an aquarium "back in the day," be sure to ask your local fish experts what might have changed since then. There have been many advances in aquarium science as recently as the last couple of years that make keeping fish a lot

easier, so be sure to take advantage of that knowledge!

BE READY TO LEARN! - Ever had a bad aquarium experience? Many people have. Remember that aquarium ownership is not difficult if you are well informed – in advance. Taking a little time to learn what is needed is not hard to do. A good aquarium store will walk you through the setup, provide you with books and handouts for reference, and will be there to answer questions at all stages of the process.

Both parents and children need to learn about what makes an aquarium system work in order to have a successful experience. Even though children are fully capable of learning how to keep their own aquariums, parents should plan to stay a step ahead – at least in the beginning. Ask your local retailer for tips and tricks on teaching kids how to care for their aquarium. If your child develops a deep interest in the aquarium hobby, don't be surprised if his or her knowledge soon surpasses your own.

LEARN PATIENCE - Aquarium ownership is one of the best ways for children (and their parents) to learn to be patient. Successful aquariums do not happen quickly. No matter how badly one may want for an aquarium to be up and running and full of fish overnight, it simply cannot be rushed. Attempts to take shortcuts often end in disaster. Remember that it takes time to get all of the fish you want into the aquarium. For that reason, if you are planning on giving an aquarium as a gift, give the aquarium first and get a gift certificate for the fish to be picked out later.

So why would a parent want to get a gift that takes months to be fully developed? In today's society where instant gratification is expected in everything we do, patience is in very short supply. As a result, very few children are learning the virtue of patience. In fact, many people reading this article are already turned off by the idea of having to wait months for an aquarium to be completed for their children. If this is you, then it is a pretty good clue that you might need a refresher course in patience!

Aquarium keeping is an experience in which all family members can play a part. Everyone can help in the setup and decoration of the aquarium. Follow that up with several family visits to the local aquarium store to buy fish. Take time to relax and enjoy the process.

DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS - You can teach your child how to plan and think critically by helping to set reasonable expectations and by providing guidance on which fish will be appropriate. Most parents do not know all of the ins and outs of how to set up an aquarium, so it is important to check in with your local retailer for guidance well in advance of your purchase. They can provide you with expert knowledge and help you get a plan together for you and your children.

As your children construct a small ecosystem, they will learn how to think ahead and make decisions. They will



Shannon Goins is a co-owner of NorthSide Aquatics, located on Counts Massie Rd. in Maumelle. She specializes in filtration and water quality management. Shannon welcomes everyone to stop in and see the new greenhouse water garden area at NorthSide Aquatics and join them on Facebook for the latest store updates.



become familiar with species specific behavior and basic rules of compatibility. Through hours of observation and examination they will come to understand the intricacies of the balance of life in their aquarium.

INCREASED EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT - Self esteem is perhaps one of the most challenging things for a child to learn. It requires the opportunity to set goals, take responsibility, make choices, be persistent, and reap the rewards of doing something well. Having an aquarium sets this process in motion and puts them on the path for success.

Of course, there will be some stumbling blocks. As with all pets, part of the experience of owning an aquarium is learning how to cope with loss. Even in the best kept aquariums, sometimes fish die. While we want to protect our children from sadness, the loss of a pet provides an opportunity for children to talk about death. As a parent, this gives you the chance to teach your children healthy ways to grieve so that they will grow into well adjusted adults.

HELP IN SCHOOL SUBJECTS - Perhaps the most obvious skill learned from having an aquarium is responsibility - feeding on a regular basis, not feeding too much, and knowing how and when to change the water. Additionally, there is the task of testing the water which uses skills in applied math, basic chemistry, and biology. Parents: be not afraid! Your local aquarium store will help you and your children learn how to perform and interpret these simple, yet important tests.

Having an aquarium in the home also stimulates children in the area of language and creative arts. Children who are actively involved in setting up an aquarium are fascinated with what they are doing and have endless questions. To that end, there are a number of picture filled books to choose from that provide information on a level that is simple, yet informative. If children have a reason to read they will read and aquariums provide that motivation. If your children cannot yet read, be assured that they will expect you to read to them that book with their fish on the cover.

Aquariums are topics for natural self expression. They often serve as the subject matter for report writing and creative stories, not to mention art. Since children have already learned about their aquariums, much of the research for school writing assignments has already been done!

Educational themes that regularly come up in conversation as a result of having an aquarium are food chains, life cycles, ecosystems, symbiotic relationships in nature, and even geography. What better way to teach children geography than to show them a map of where their fish originated? Many so-called "teachable moments" happen when an aquarium is nearby.

As the holidays draw ever closer and you find yourself considering a pet for your child. Remember that no matter what you choose – fin, fur, or feather – it should never be a last minute decision. Be sure that your choice is right for your home, and do your research in advance! Taking the time to do it right from the outset can lead your children to an appreciation of a truly incredible hobby. The life lessons learned and educational rewards will still be with your children for years to come.



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